

The Builder.

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THE stern warning given to the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers by Mr. Phillips, their chief surveyor, and his proposal to construct 20 miles of tunnel sewer at such a depth from the surface, say "100 feet below the bed of the river," as would render it independent of all barriers,—have excited considerable attention, and seem to call for some observations on our part. We have watched the proceedings of the new commission with much solicitude from the first, and in our pages will be found the only continuous public record of their proceedings in open court.* The space which this record occupies is large, and we have, out of consideration for that section of our readers who may not feel immediately interested in the matter, avoided enlarging it by observations. The present position of the commission, however, is so extraordinary, that to pass it by without comment is impossible.

We need not remind our readers in other than the shortest sentence, that the old Westminster Commission was superseded (and the other commissions went with it), mainly through the efforts of Mr. Leslie and Mr. Byng, two of its members, and the statements made, at what then seemed great pecuniary risk, by the clerk of the commission, Mr. Hertslet, and the surveyor, Mr. Phillips. About a year and a half ago the new commission was appointed, and these two members of the old body and these two officers were, as a matter of course, put on it. This was done, we say, but a year and a half ago, and we now find the new commission exactly in the position of the old one previous to its dissolution. Mr. Byng has withdrawn himself; Mr. Leslie has ceased his regular attendance; the surveyor considers it "time to speak out, both for the credit of the court and for the reputation of its officers," and to prevent proceedings "calculated to bring the commission into ridicule;" and Mr. Hertslet, whose ability, courtesy, and fitness for his office all have acknowledged, says he can no longer go on with the commissioners, and gives evidence of the strength of his conviction by the surrender of nine hundred good pounds a-year.

This surely is a conjunction of circumstances which should lead to a careful and searching self-examination on the part of the commission. Without expressing any decided opinion at this moment, we earnestly invite them to it, our anxiety simply being to see the commission working unanimously and well for the public good; and this, we are quite sure, is the desire of the excellent nobleman, the Earl of Carlisle, who presides. The majority of the commissioners scarcely appreciate the magnitude of their task, or see, what is the fact, the utter impossibility of effecting it satisfactorily by the mode they are now pursuing: some few of them, indeed, we have no hesitation in saying, are quite unfit for the office. The establishment of principle has been sadly neglected; the—but we will not now speak harshly—the com-

mission has had difficulties to contend against, and may yet claim our indulgence for a time.

To add to the present troubles of the commissioners, they have been thrown into Chancery. In pursuance of a recent order, the officers of the commission proceeded the other day to fill in the putrid and offensive ditches at Bermondsey, in the vicinity of which many fatal cases of cholera have recently occurred, and in consequence of this proceeding Mr. Rains, the owner of the property, has filed a bill in Chancery to restrain their operations; in which he prays that the commissioners may be decreed to give notice of the intended nature of their operations, that he may be enabled to make a proper claim for privilege and compensation money, or to make the necessary deposit in the Bank of England, according to the Lands Clauses Act, 1845, and that in the meantime the Metropolitan Commissioners may be restrained from doing any works which may affect his interests. The Vice-Chancellor gave the plaintiff leave to move on Thursday morning last for the injunction as prayed by the bill. On that day, the subject having been partially discussed, was postponed till Saturday, in order that the commissioners, should they think fit, might have the opportunity of exhibiting their plan of operations. The Judge, however, stated his decided opinion to be, that their proceedings were illegal, unless protected by the 61st section of their Act, enabling works of haste to be done without notice. The plaintiff's counsel responded, that this was a work that would occupy three months, and to proceed with it without notice, therefore, must be illegal on his honour's showing: the 61st section did not apply to such works at all. We shall see.

Now, as to the proposed tunnel sewer. The surveyor's letter, which has caused such commotion, is one result of the committee system.

Two plans for the improvement of the drainage of Westminster,—one by Mr. Austin, the other by Mr. Phillips,—were made sixteen months ago, and appear to have been referred to the "Survey Committee." Members of the commission have asked for them at various times,—but the court, as a court, has heard nothing of them. On the 15th of June, according to Mr. Phillips, the Survey Committee passed resolutions "approving in effect the suggestions of Mr. Austin's report;" and then, forthwith, comes out Mr. Phillips's letter, warning the commissioners "against attempting to execute the works therein contemplated," and stating that these are "wholly impracticable, and unworthy the objects which should be kept in view for the perfect drainage of this great metropolis;" containing, moreover, an entirely fresh suggestion for improving the drainage,—that is, fresh so far as the commission is concerned. Now, this certainly does seem rather a pre-

ceding on the part of the surveyor, scarcely warrantable; unless, indeed, those who are behind the curtain see that the resolution of a committee is in effect tantamount to a decision of the court, in which case the object might be to prevent the committee from bringing up their report in the threatened shape.

Mr. Austin's plan, which has been called the "converging system," is to divide the locality into certain districts, and to construct in each an enormous cesspool, or "sump," as he terms it, to which the drains of the district are to converge. The contents, thus accumulated, are to be raised by steam-engines, and distributed from time to time, through subterranean pipes, over the country, or into the Thames. This plan, with every consideration for the ability of Mr. Austin, and the eminent engineers said to have been consulted upon it, is exceedingly unsatisfactory and objectionable. The great desideratum is to remove the refuse from us, not to accumulate it amongst us, and, moreover, to do this without contaminating our noble river, or transforming what should be a means of purification and a source of health, into a stream of corruption and the fruitful parent of disease.

All are now agreed as to the necessity of this latter condition, the preservation of the Thames: to persevere in the present course would show insanity, and all honour should be given to Mr. John Martin and others, who have been urging this point for years, before the public mind was awakened to its importance.*

The deep sewer proposed by Mr. Phillips is to be constructed in a slightly and uniformly curved direction, from Kingston on the western to the Kent or Essex marshes on the eastern extremity of the jurisdiction of the court, and there suitable reservoirs are to be provided, whence the refuse could be pumped up by steam power, and used either in a liquid or a solid state. It is to take off the whole of the house-drainage and other waters which at present compose the ordinary flow of the London sewers in fine weather, and the capacity of a tunnel for such a purpose he estimates would be 5 feet at Greenwich and 6 feet in diameter at Pimlico. In its passage it goes under the Thames twelve times, as well as under the West India Docks. The cost of 6 miles proposed to be immediately done he puts at 200,000l.

The general idea is not a new one, and for the purposes of the public it is none the worse for that.

In 1843 Mr. Thomas Cubitt published a short pamphlet, entitled "Suggestions for improving the state of the River Thames and the Drainage of London" wherein, after pointing out the injury done by discharging the sewers into the Thames, he says,—

"My idea is, that the best means of obviating this evil would be to conduct the sewer drainage at once from the west and north parts of London, by the shortest and straightest lines that can be found, to a place in the east of the town (and perhaps the low lands of Plaistow or Barking Level would be the best calculated for the purpose), and there, near to the river, to form one or more very large reservoirs to receive the discharge from the sewers, where it should remain during the flow of the tide, having gates or sluices to be opened as

* A meeting of the court was held at a very short notice on Monday last, when the following resolutions were passed:—"That whereas it is of the greatest importance that the works in progress should not be stayed; and whereas an Act of Parliament provides for compensation to parties sustaining damage,—the application to the Court of Chancery, of which notice has been given by Mr. Henry Rains, be opposed, and that the solicitors of the commissioners have authority to give or accede to such undertakings or terms as the Court of Chancery, on the hearing of the motion, may require or approve in reference to the supply of water, or otherwise, and to agree to any reference, and to the plaintiff's right being tried at law, or otherwise." The chief surveyor presented a report, which set forth that it would be necessary to lay down about 3,200 feet in length of 18-inch pipe, for the purpose of supplying the tunnellers and other works with water, the expense of which would be 350l., and to accommodate the drainage of the houses and premises draining into the stream, about 3,700 feet of 9-inch pipe would be required, at an expense of 470l. These works would enable one branch of the mill-stream to be filled up as far as George-row, and also another branch from Little George-street in Dockhead, leaving the mill-ponds to be dealt with hereafter. Other resolutions were passed showing that the commissioners are determined to proceed with the works.

* Whether it is desirable to continue this may be open to question.

* Mr. Martin has recently issued several pamphlets and reports, showing a number of important suggestions made by him from time to time.—"Thames and Metropolitan Improvement Plan," by John Martin, E.L., London, Lindsey House, Chelsea, 1849; "Reprint of Report of the Committee appointed to take into consideration Mr. Martin's plan for rearing the Thames from every species of pollution" 1836, and some others. Mr. Martin deserves the best opinion of his countrymen.